How The West DESTROYED The Unipolar Order | J. Matlock, K. vd Heuvel, A. Lieven

Forty years after Reykjavík, Ambassador Jack Matlock, Katrina vanden Heuvel and Anatol Lieven revisit the summit that brought nuclear abolition within reach. Matlock shares firsthand memories of Reagan, Gorbachev and the negotiations behind the headlines. The panel examines strategic defense, resistance to détente, Soviet reform, NATO expansion and the erosion of arms control. They contrast Cold War diplomacy with today's confrontation and discuss why mutual security, restraint and cooperation remain essential to preventing catastrophe and rebuilding a more peaceful world. Guest Links: American Committee for US-Russia Accord: https://usrussiaaccord.org/ Jack Matlock's website: https://jackmatlock.com/ Katrina vanden Heuvel at The Nation: https://www.thenation.com/authors/katrina-vanden-heuvel/ Anatol Lieven at the Quincy Institute: https://quincyinst.org/author/anatol-lieven/ Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: https://pascallottaz.substack.com Support Neutrality Studies: https://neutralitystudies.com/donate Neutrality Studies shop: https://neutralitystudies.com/shop Time Stamps 00:00 Reykjavík at 40: ACURA and the guests 03:00 Jack Matlock: how Reagan and Gorbachev reached Reykjavík 14:12 Strategic defense and the nuclear abolition debate 21:56 Anatol Lieven joins: idealism and the memory of war 33:45 Katrina vanden Heuvel: Gorbachev's vision 38:22 The INF Treaty and Europe's nuclear risks 40:50 Who resisted détente—and what followed the Cold War 59:55 Matlock's closing lessons: cooperation, not victory

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies, to a special episode about the 40th anniversary of the now historic Reykjavik Summit in 1986. And we've got with us two fantastic thinkers. First and foremost, of course, the penultimate—the second-to-last—U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, which is something I usually get wrong, but this time I think I got it right: Ambassador Jack Matlock, who was there himself in Reykjavik. And we've got Katrina vanden Heuvel, the president of the American Committee for U.S.-Russia Accord, ACURA. Both of you, welcome.

#Katrina vanden Heuvel

Thank you, Pascal. Yes, thank you very much.

#Pascal

And maybe let me hand over first to Katrina to just give us a couple of words about ACURA and also the work you've been doing on trying to bring the United States and Russia into peaceful waters.

#Katrina vanden Heuvel

It is an honor to be on with Ambassador Matlock. It's very good to be on with you, Pascal. The committee is really designed to bring about a better relationship—to bring dialogue and diplomacy, not escalation and warlike talk, to the U.S.-Russian relationship. Ambassador Matlock exemplifies what diplomats can do. He played a key role at a moment when the most radical, committed arms reductionist and abolitionist, President Mikhail Gorbachev, was in power. And I think the work we all do is designed to bring about dialogue and better relations. I want to dedicate this program to Novaya Gazeta, which has been closed by the authorities in the last few days because of the "foreign agent" designation.

But that was Mikhail Gorbachev's newspaper, and he believed in it and in its stance on the nuclear issue. Jack Matlock was present not only at the summits where it was declared that nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, but also at the Cuban Missile Crisis. Maybe we'll hear about that. So Ambassador Matlock exemplifies wisdom that is not present at the moment in our U.S.-Russian relationship. It would be very interesting, Ambassador, to hear how you see today in light of the history you've seen, because we went from a moment when there was hope—an entire class of nuclear weapons was abolished in 1987—to a moment when we have no nuclear guardrails at all. There is no arms control infrastructure. So it is a perilous moment, and one you are certainly well equipped to speak to. So I turn it over to you.

#Jack Matlock

Well, thank you for the opportunity to talk about these things. Today, I think we are in a very dangerous situation because, I would say, since the late 1990s, we have forgotten the diplomacy that we used to end the Cold War. And unfortunately, we have not had leaders with the vision that we had when we negotiated the end of the Cold War. Now, that meeting in Reykjavik was one of the key meetings. We accomplished a lot at that meeting, though at the time it was put down by the media as a failure. And I'd like to explain some of the background of that. But I would say that at that meeting, we had President Reagan and President Gorbachev.

At that meeting, we had two people who were probably among the few in the world who thought we could abolish nuclear weapons and were in favor of it. And they came very close to agreeing to that, but even if they had, it would have been very difficult to carry it out. But let me give a little background. Gorbachev and Reagan had met for the first time in Geneva. At first, Reagan wanted to invite Gorbachev to come to Washington, and the Soviets invited Reagan to come to Moscow. Well, Reagan's people said, "Oh, you can't do that. You can't go there, particularly since the last summit was in the Soviet Union, at Vladivostok." And so, after some negotiation, it was decided they would meet in Geneva.

And when they met, they had, I think, a very good discussion of many things, and we came to some very significant agreements on expanding our exchanges, which had almost been terminated by the

previous administration because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. But at the same time, we were still fairly far apart on nuclear weapons reductions. In January, a few months after that, we got a message from Gorbachev. I recall that I was in a meeting elsewhere in Moscow, and I got a message on my pager to come immediately to the White House. And I did, and they showed me the text of a letter that had just arrived from Gorbachev, proposing, among other things, an agreement to abolish nuclear weapons. That was along with other proposals.

And my first question when I looked at it was, "Have they publicized this?" Because I thought if it was publicized, you know, it was going to be taken more as propaganda than as a serious proposal. And I was told, "Oh, yes, well, it's coming in from TASS right now." But the president had already looked at it, and he said, "Now, is this the first time a Soviet leader has proposed the abolition of nuclear weapons?" And I said, "Well, I think so." And I pointed out that there were going to be a lot of problems with some of these other details. "We're going to have to negotiate them." And he said, "Well, okay, but we're not going to knock the idea of eliminating nuclear weapons." Shultz came over and looked at it, and he said, "You know, I think the president's onto something."

And almost everybody in the bureaucracy said, "Oh, that's crazy. You can't eliminate nuclear weapons, and they're not serious." But in any event, that stuck in our minds. Now, at Geneva, one of the things they had agreed on was that they would meet again, with Gorbachev coming to Washington and then Reagan going to Moscow. And Reagan was very eager to bring Gorbachev to the United States. He was thinking of taking him in a helicopter and letting him look at the prosperity of our cities and how our system was really better than theirs. But Gorbachev kept putting off making a commitment, saying, "Well, one meeting without a nuclear arms agreement was fine, but we can't have a second, or it would look like a failure."

And that jockeying went on for about six months or longer. And then another letter came in from Gorbachev. And again, I was called in on that one. And this said, "Before we meet in Washington, let's meet again very quickly, maybe for just a day. Just business, either in London or Reykjavik." Well, you know, before, when we had met in third countries, it would have been sort of a neutral place like Switzerland. Here he was offering a meeting in two NATO allies. And I thought that was significant. And I said, "Of course, you know, we need to accept that meeting, but make it Reykjavik because we went to Geneva first."

We had to accommodate hundreds of correspondents. In fact, we had to build bleachers outside the place where they met in order to accommodate them. And I said, "You know, we don't want to make this a media circus. And there's just not enough accommodation in Reykjavik for 700 correspondents." And I also said, "You know, since it's going to be all business, it's probably better if the First Lady doesn't go." And they said, "Well, if she doesn't, will Mrs. Gorbachev come?" And I said, "Oh, of course not. They understand protocol." Well, as it turned out, of course, Reagan did not like to travel without his wife, but they accepted that.

But when we showed up at Reykjavik, Raisa Gorbachev was there, doing sort of interviews and public relations. Well, that didn't make a great impression. But to follow on this, also in our briefings, those of us on the National Security Council and in the State Department had tried to brief the press, saying that, well, the purpose of this is to try to make progress in our arms control negotiations and on the other items on our agenda. We had put forward a sort of four-part agenda. But at that time, the chief of staff in the White House was giving interviews and saying, "Oh, it'll be a success if we only just get another meeting," thinking that was going to be automatic.

We had advised against that on the National Security Council, but that made it look as if, if we didn't get an agreement for another meeting, it was going to be a failure. So we go into the meetings, and the big issue was the Strategic Defense Initiative, SDI. Gorbachev was demanding that we terminate that. Reagan had been convinced that we really had to do research and see if it was possible to have a defense. And he thought that was not contradictory to abolishing nuclear weapons. He said, "We outlawed poison gas, but we didn't throw away our gas masks." And in any event, this was part of it.

And in the correspondence before that meeting, Reagan had, at one point, offered to agree to eliminate ballistic missiles if we had an agreement that included the Strategic Defense Initiative. That was something that nobody in the bureaucracy thought we could do. And every time I would put that in his letters or a speech, others would take it out. And then, when Reagan saw the draft, he would put it back in. And I remember he finally said, "Damn it, Jack, that's what I want to say. Leave it in." But that was something that nobody in the bureaucracy agreed with. He was saying, "Okay, if we can have our Strategic Defense Initiative, we will agree to eliminate all ballistic missiles."

#Pascal

Can you just quickly explain the Strategic Defense Initiative? What did that imply? Why was that such a linchpin for Reagan to say, "Okay, we can go ahead as long as we can have that"?

#Anatol Lieven

Hey guys, Autumn Spirit is here, and we've launched our new merch.

#Pascal

For instance, the monster from our Kyoto Symposium has arrived on T-shirts, tumblers, and magnets. The little fella is really cute. Check it out. Any purchase directly helps us keep the lights on. So thanks a lot, and see you soon.

#Jack Matlock

That had been an issue because, as I learned later from talking to Soviet officials, many in the Soviet military thought that it was simply a cover for putting nuclear weapons in space or using other weapons, such as lasers and so on, to attack targets on Earth. That was not part of the initiative, but that was what they thought. Now, the irony here is that Gorbachev was offering at the meeting that if we would keep research on SDI in laboratories for 10 years, he could agree to it. And actually, I thought that would be a reasonable settlement, but many others didn't. And the whole matter of the Strategic Defense Initiative had become almost a symbol, I would say, particularly in Reagan's mind. And he felt it was his obligation to try to see if we could develop a defense.

Now, for our national security advisers, I know Bud McFarlane thought that, well, you know, this is a scam, that obviously it's something that can't really work. But we were trying to get them to reduce their heavy missiles. They had developed missiles with 10 independently targeted warheads, and we had nothing of that kind. They were also mobile, so you couldn't target them. And we were developing one with just three warheads. But then Congress finally wouldn't approve it because they were going to have to put them either on highways or railways. And of course, people said, "No, we don't want these things in our backyard." So we thought it was important to stop the MIRVing by saying, "Okay, we'll develop a defense against it."

#Jack Matlock

To get them to agree to stop the MIRVing. These things get very complicated, but when you're dealing with bureaucracies with a stake in these various things, they can get, you know, very heated. But the bottom line is that Reagan really wanted to eliminate them and was willing to agree to abolish ballistic missiles as well. Now, we were told, "Okay, you'll have to sort of define the difference between normal artillery and a ballistic missile." But as I said, our bureaucracy was totally against it. But he reversed that. Well, this was something that Gorbachev did not pick up on, although Reagan had proposed it at Reykjavik.

Well, at the final meeting on that second day, Reagan said at one point, “Yes, we can eliminate nuclear weapons.” But at the same time, he was insisting on keeping his Strategic Defense Initiative. And so, during the break, when we were discussing this, somebody said, “Maybe we should stay another day and negotiate these things overnight.” And I remember Reagan’s face fell, and he said, “Oh, shit.” And I realized that he had promised to come back and have dinner with his wife. He certainly would have stayed if she had been there. So we go back to the decision for her not to come. Anyway, we didn’t stay. And when they came out, they both looked as if it had been a total failure.

George Shultz was then going off to Brussels to brief our NATO allies, and I flew back with Reagan on Air Force One. And we had a number of correspondents there. I talked to the interpreter from that last meeting, and I said, “Look, you know, we have achieved a lot in this,” because we had had working groups not only for arms control but for the other items on our agenda. And I remember

talking to Poindexter, who was the national security adviser, and he said, “Well, you better go back and brief the correspondents who are on the plane,” because we had made really substantial progress. Well, in any event, it was portrayed as a failure.

But the fact was, we had made progress in many areas. And I think, thinking back, even if the two had agreed that we were going to eliminate nuclear weapons, we still would have had to go through a whole series of very difficult negotiations. We were not yet at that stage. In fact, my first task when we got back to Washington, after we went around and briefed some of our allies about what had happened, was to devise a scenario of steps that we would have to take to eliminate nuclear weapons. The day that I was ready to send that to the president, Poindexter was fired over the whole Iran-Contra affair, which intersected with this and threw our diplomacy off for several months. So that's some of the background behind it.

#Pascal

Thank you very much for that very comprehensive background, Ambassador. And I'm happy to say that we've now been joined by Anatol Lieven from Responsible Statecraft. Anatol, welcome. And maybe I can hand it over to you. I mean, Anatol, Reykjavik in 1986 was probably the closest we ever came to having a decision made to abolish nuclear weapons. And Ambassador Matlock just gave us the background of all the diplomatic developments that led to the actual discussions and what happened in order to get there. And again, even now, Reykjavik is indeed framed as a failure, as a failure to come to an agreement. However, as Ambassador Matlock said, it was a moment when a lot of progress was made. What is your assessment of that particular moment of the Cold War?

#Anatol Lieven

Well, first of all, I'm so sorry about being late. I was unavoidably delayed. I'm glad to be here. Thank you for inviting me. I mean, on the details of Reykjavik, you know, I could not possibly compete with or follow Ambassador Matlock on this. So I thought I'd talk about it more generally and also contrast the atmosphere of Reykjavik with what we see today. Something strikes me very much looking back. You know, when Reykjavik happened, I was a young journalist in Pakistan, so I was not remotely as close to it.

But of course, Reykjavik in many ways, you know, began the process which eventually led to, or contributed greatly to, the fall of the Berlin Wall. I mean, from a Soviet point of view, it was part of Gorbachev's reform program as well: the attempt to reduce tension with the United States and end the Cold War—or perhaps, as we now see it, interrupt the Cold War, or create a pause between one Cold War and another Cold War. And one thing that strikes me about the contrast is that a bit later, when I came back to Europe as a journalist, I was able to interview quite a number of the leaders of that time—mostly former leaders, people like Helmut Schmidt in Germany.

And compared to the present, they had a far greater sense of responsibility. Above all, of course, these were people who remembered the Second World War, who had lived through it, even if only as children. Schmidt, of course, had fought in the Second World War with the Wehrmacht. They knew something about war and therefore had this deep commitment—even if they were as tough, you know, as Schmidt was, or Kohl—to the avoidance of war, a deep sense of responsibility. They were also, of course, of that generation which had seen the appearance of nuclear weapons as something completely new and, of course, in the shadow of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as something absolutely terrifying, you know, as a new and apocalyptic threat to humanity.

And, of course, they had a sense, particularly in Germany, but to some extent in other countries as well, of a certain degree, shall we say, of moral modesty. You know, a certain humility, however staunchly anti-communist they were. I remember a German Catholic politician quoting to me the old Catholic phrase, "We are all sinners, and black sinners," which, of course, if you look at the 1940s, was pretty much true. And I have to say, I never believed in the complete abolition of nuclear weapons at Reykjavik, partly because, of course, you would have had to persuade the Indians and the Pakistanis as well at some stage, and the Chinese and the North Koreans. And what about the Israelis?

Yes. But, I mean, if the process in many ways initiated at Reykjavik had continued, it could and should, at the very least, have led to a radical reduction in the number of nuclear weapons and a much deeper and more enduring set of arms control agreements. I mean, you did, of course, have nuclear arms control agreements, which, first and foremost, the United States has torn up over the past generation, starting with George Bush. But what you also saw—something which I have to say, again speaking, like, I fear, the other members of this panel, from a somewhat greater age—was the tremendous idealism. You know, the ambassador alluded to the resistance of the American establishment to Reagan.

#Anatol Lieven

I mean, Jack could talk about this far more than I could. Much of the American establishment regarded Reagan as impossibly naive in his dealings with the Soviet Union—impossibly idealistic and optimistic in his desire to abolish this menace. And, of course, it's terribly interesting looking at Gorbachev from that point of view, because an absolute curse of the current portrayal of the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet transition—including, I'm sorry to say, in many academic circles, and certainly in journalistic ones, in the media—is that it is essentially, without quite openly saying so, predicated on the idea that until Gorbachev came along, the Soviet Union was basically Stalinist. You know, that the Stalinist system persisted throughout.

They've completely forgotten about Khrushchev, of course, through Brezhnev. And then Gorbachev came from nowhere, essentially, and tried to transform this system, destroying it in the process. Then you had a sort of period of confusion in the 1990s, and then Putin brings Stalinism back. Now,

what this entirely fails to explain, of course, is where Gorbachev himself came from. And this brings out the very curious mixture in the Soviet Union. Of course, it was in many ways a repressive system, even deeply repressive, willing to use force at least until '68—not really after that. But it was also a system which, hypocritically, but not entirely hypocritically, tried to express and continue a considerable degree of humanist idealism, if you read the literature, including the official literature, or watch the cinema of the time.

And this, of course, also reflected the way in which, if you like, the old intelligentsia or its heirs, you know, had been able, after Stalin's death, to move back into the heart of Soviet culture. We, of course, see everything through the prism of the dissidents. But there were a great many more people who were by no means part of the nomenklatura or the official establishment, but were nonetheless tremendously influential in Russia—culturally, morally, spiritually, and educationally. You know, we think of Tarkovsky, who, of course, was eventually more or less suppressed by the Soviet state. But the films of Eldar Ryazanov, for example, would be the great cinematic example of this.

Now, by the 1980s, of course, there were the failures of the Soviet economic system and the gap between official statements and observable reality. And actually, by contemporary standards, if I may say so—contemporary American presidential standards—the corruption of the late Soviet Union was minuscule by comparison, perhaps with the exception of the Central Asians. But nonetheless, it was sufficient to deeply undermine, you know, faith in the system and indeed communist ideology. And certainly, as far as much of the cultural intelligentsia is concerned, you know, by the 1980s, you had a mood of deep cynicism amounting almost to nihilism. And this had terrible effects later in the 1990s, when everything fell to pieces.

#Pascal

May I just interject here? Yes, because this is very interesting, the nihilism that went along with it. But then we have to contrast that with Gorbachev’s idea of actually proposing the abolition of nuclear weapons, which is a very idealistic thing, right?

#Anatol Lieven

But that's what I'm coming to. That's what I'm coming to, because Gorbachev was a child during the Second World War, but his formative years, in many ways, were during the thaw, you know, under Khrushchev. And he embodied—I mean, as many Russians would think now, to an exaggerated and dangerous extent—these elements of idealism and humanism. I've never quite understood, with Gorbachev, how this survived many years, you know, as part of the Soviet government, but it clearly did. And we thought this at the time, you know, with Gorbymania: Gorbachev was really, you know, reintroducing or cultivating in international affairs in Europe a new way of looking at international relations.

#Katrina vanden Heuvel

I would say that the speech he gave at the United Nations in December 1988 was one of the great speeches, filled with humanism and a belief in a new security architecture from Vladivostok to Lisbon. Absolutely. It was about demilitarization and the possibilities of a new security architecture, which today, by the way, when it's mentioned in discussions about resolving Ukraine, is called a Putin narrative—the new security architecture. But Gorbachev emerged from the shestidesyatniki, the Sixties generation, who were shaped by Khrushchev, as Anatole said so clearly. And I think, when you think of Gorbachev's era, the international piece is so vital.

And those who were pro-détente were not Margaret Thatcher or Helmut Kohl, but Egon Bahr and Brandt—those forces who were pro-détente, a word we don't hear much anymore. And then there was the brain trust. There are books about Chernyaev, his right-hand person on international relations. They had been in exile, in a kind of quasi-internal exile during the Brezhnev years. And their mentor, to some extent, was Andropov. But that ended. But I would say that there was, I think, a great success—not an unfulfilled one—in developing a new vision of international relations. And then glasnost. Glasnost was essentially an anti-Stalinist campaign to open up the cultural sphere. And that's where you saw the revelations every day, the wall newspapers with thousands of people gathered around to see what the latest was.

So, the dismantling of a Stalinist system, which had, by the way, affected almost everyone in Gorbachev's cabinet. Everyone had a father or an uncle or an aunt who'd been in the camps, the gulag, or had some related experience. The final thing I'll say is I've spoken to Pavel Palashchenko. I know both of you know him. He was between Reagan and Gorbachev as they left the house in Reykjavik. And it was not a failure. But the media had an investment in calling it a failure, just as the establishment did. Don't forget—and I'll stop, Pascal—but this was when Alexander Haig was calling Gorbachev "Stalin in Gucci shoes," you know, in '86. It took a while to understand what was happening in the Soviet Union, if you wanted to.

#Pascal

But this is fascinating. And Anatole, you were not here when Ambassador Matlock actually explained that the main reason to choose Reykjavik was so there wouldn't be enough accommodation for all the journalists who wanted to cover this, because they would sabotage it. And Ambassador Matlock, looking at it now, it seems that the establishment, including the establishment media, was dead set against any kind of positive outcome in '86. And even what came out of it—you know, as you correctly said, there was a lot of progress made—they trashed that. And they managed to talk it away and basically, you know, sweep it away. Why is that? Why, in your analysis, was the administration at this point apparently not able to sell its vision—its positive vision, together with the Soviet Union, for a more peaceful world—to the establishment in the United States?

#Jack Matlock

I think it's wrong to say that the media was against an agreement. I think basically most people would have welcomed an agreement. The reason I wanted to restrict the number of people—obviously, we were going to have good media coverage—was that dealing with the hundreds of correspondents we had at Geneva is simply, you know, rather difficult. We certainly had plenty of media there. It was covered and all that stuff. So this was not the problem. If there was a problem, it was the briefings saying that its main success would have been an agreement for another summit. And that, I think, which had been spread, as I said, by some of our people, made it look as if it was a failure when, in fact, it had been a great success in many respects. It brought us closer on a number of things.

#Katrina vanden Heuvel

Do you think the decision to dismantle a set of missiles under the INF Treaty came out of the Reykjavik journey?

#Jack Matlock

We got closer on that, but we had been arguing for abolishing them all along, and they were arguing that they wanted to keep a certain number. I see. And then there was a problem of, well, how do you verify this? So it had been our proposal from the very beginning to eliminate these. In fact, the main reason we deployed them was in order to force an elimination. And this is something we should bear in mind today. The reason we deployed intermediate-range missiles in Germany and some of the other places was as a bargaining chip to say, let's get rid of these things. Because the idea was that if we did not have them there, if the Soviets attacked Western Europe with nuclear weapons, we probably would not retaliate and expose our own homeland to attack.

So if we had the missiles there, that would be some insurance. Now, we agreed to eliminate them. That agreement is no longer in existence, and I think that's something the West Europeans have to bear in mind. Because if they push things, say, over Ukraine to the point that the Russians think, you might say, their national existence is threatened, they could use weapons, say, against defense facilities in some of the bordering countries. And there's no way any American president is going to retaliate for that. And that's something I think the Germans particularly should be bearing in mind today.

#Pascal

It would be fantastic if the Europeans kept in mind that their security depends on both superpowers agreeing that Europe should be safe. But may I just ask you—and we'll go again from Ambassador Matlock to Anatole to Katerina—if we look at the great successes of détente during the Cold War, what stands out is that, at the beginning, there was an idea of getting to that point. In 1958, negotiations started that, 10 years later, ended in the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It took 10 years, but we got to non-proliferation. We had the idea that led to Helsinki, which also took five or six years of

negotiation—you know, the Helsinki Final Act. It took a long time, but it started with the idea that something needed to be done.

And that was the idea in ’68, of détente: let’s get to a place where we agree on a couple of common principles. And in this sense, you know, the idea in ’86 of getting to Reykjavik was that we needed to do something jointly against the threat of nuclear weapons, right? Ambassador Matlock, where do you think that idealism of doing something good came up against some of the forces that tried to go the other way? Where did the main push against all of these ideas and against Reykjavik come from? Who was the most ardent internal enemy, kind of, of the idea of such a détente?

#Jack Matlock

Well, we had, you know, what we called the neocons in the United States, who felt that it was impossible to make any agreement with the Soviet Union, that they were...

#Jack Matlock

There was also the idea that we had to settle things by using force or the threat of force. And certainly that was represented in the administration by the Secretary of Defense, Weinberger. But he did not represent Reagan's view. Reagan was someone who didn't like to fire his friends. Actually, when I started working at the White House, before the summits started, they made one of our first meetings so secret that we met not in our usual room in the West Wing of the White House, but in a room in the residence with just about seven people.

And the Secretary of Defense was there, the Secretary of State, our National Security Advisor, the Chief of Staff in the White House, the Chief of Staff of the military. And Reagan said, “I think it's time to start negotiating with the Soviet Union. We need some agreements there.” And I remember Weinberger said, “Look, you know, that's a communist system. They cheat. You can't negotiate with them.” And I remember Reagan looked at him and said, “Cap, we're not going that route.” And that told me that later, when I was drafting things for him, I could put things in that I thought were necessary for the agenda and so on, and Reagan would always approve them.

For example, you know, I had him speak also about these proxy wars and say something that many in the administration would not have said: “Look, we don't blame these wars on the Soviet Union. They are local. The problem is that we have taken opposite sides in a local issue. We've got to pull back from that and bring about peace, and then cooperate to help them develop.” And he really believed that. I mean, he approved it. There were many in the government who would not have. So Reagan was able, in effect, to outflank those who felt you can't negotiate with the Soviet Union.

And I would point out that the main arms control agreement, the one that eliminated the intermediate-range missiles, received six no votes when it went to the Senate for ratification. They were all Republicans. The problem then was that even if we had had a Democratic president who

could have negotiated these things—and I think we could have—they could not have gotten them ratified. And that's why someone like Reagan, who could not be outflanked from the right politically but who was committed to these agreements, was able to carry us through this, when others who obviously could have negotiated these things probably couldn't have gotten them ratified.

And there was no Soviet leader other than Gorbachev who would have been able to carry them on their side. When I was interviewing for my book on Reagan and Gorbachev, I had several interviews with Gorbachev. In one of them, when I told him I was going to write that book, he said, "That's good. You knew both of us." And I said, "Well, let me tell you what my conclusions are. First of all, it took both of you to end the Cold War. Neither of you could have done it alone." He said, "That's absolutely right." And then I said, "However, it was you who took the Communist Party out of control of the Soviet Union."

And he said, "Jack, you have that absolutely right." He said, "This was a system that could not be changed from the bottom up. It had to be changed from the top down. And by God, I did it." Later, I asked him why he hadn't moved forward earlier on some of his measures, particularly perestroika. You know, glasnost came first, but then perestroika was the reconstruction, I might say. And he said, "Okay, in 1987, how many votes would I have had in the Politburo for that?" And I said, "Well, maybe three." "Yeah," he said, "you're absolutely right. There was no way I could have moved earlier."

#Pascal

Anatole, what is your assessment of the forces that worked against détente during the Cold War, especially in this period from 1986 to 1989? And I must say, Ambassador Matlock is the one who always says, "Look, the Cold War ended in 1989 because we decided we wanted to end it, not because the United States won." But there were always forces against this kind of détente, Anatole.

#Anatol Lieven

There were, and indeed there are. I mean, from the start of the '90s, I was a journalist in the former Soviet Union. In those days, unlike today, there were differences. But one considerable section of the Western media, backed by, of course, sections of the establishment, never really changed its attitude at all. I mean, there was a brief hiccup when the Soviet Union actually collapsed. But very soon after that, you had people writing about how Yeltsin's agenda was to restore the Soviet Union, and how the Russians had always been imperialists. And if you look at institutions like Chatham House in London, there was essentially no change. It continued. It may have moderated its tone a little, but there was no basic change in the attitude.

And, of course, two things are fundamental to that. I mean, one is that, especially in America—less so perhaps in Europe, because our security establishments were older—the entire modern security establishment, the modern military, the intelligence services, were creatures of the Cold War. I

mean, they originated in the Second World War, but it was the Cold War that shaped them. And throughout the Cold War, of course, Russia was treated as a synonym for the Soviet Union. So, in many ways, it's hardly surprising that people simply continued with the same attitude afterwards. But you had this tremendous underlying institutional need to go on seeing whatever came out of Moscow as an enemy, or at the very least as a potential enemy.

Tremendous bureaucratic and economic interests aligned against any genuine reconciliation. And then, of course, there was the role of the—whatever you want to call them—the émigrés, the ethnic lobbies from Eastern Europe and the Soviet republics, which, you know, throughout were keeping up a drumbeat of bitter hostility to Gorbachev and, after that, to Russia. And of course, disastrously, they were given tremendous power within NATO and the European Union as a result of the expansion of NATO and the European Union. And, you know, they have simply continued with their attitudes. I mean, if you want to be kind, you could say they were Cold War attitudes. But if you look at the Poles in particular, these are attitudes going back 500 years or more.

#Pascal

Katrina, what's your analysis? What do you think we can learn from Reykjavik and the way it was treated?

#Katrina vanden Heuvel

You know, there was a moment in this country when there was popular support for nuclear disarmament. I'm thinking of 1982, when you had a million people in Central Park calling for disarmament. It wasn't abolition. And in 1983, there was an important event. A hundred million people watched The Day After, which was so important that the Reagan White House, including Ken Adelman, called in the producers and directors of The Day After, which was going to be shown for three hours on ABC. But then it shifted, and you had more attention to active shooters than nukes. And I think the regression and dismantling of arms control have not been stemmed. And in this climate, it will be very, very tough, particularly because what we were talking about as a futuristic threat is appearing. You have the space weapons.

You have a new face of war, which we see brutally, savagely played out in Ukraine today. But I do think the establishment—mea culpa, the liberal-left community on Russia today—has essentially been defined by Russiagate: that Putin is Trump and Trump is Putin, and that there's no sanity. There's no larger thinking beyond calling it "Putin talking points" when you say de-escalation, dialogue, diplomacy. People sometimes think it's appeasement because the lessons of diplomacy haven't been taught, certainly not to a new generation. I think it's fascinating, the alternative view of Reagan. It's kind of like Saturday Night Live, where he's doltish, and then people leave the room and he's masterminding the intervention in El Salvador. Yeah, I feel responsible to some extent. My grandfather was Reagan's agent and brought him into millions of homes as the host of GE Theater.

But I do think there's a pivotal moment in history where, if Nancy Reagan had been at Reykjavik, you might have had a chance. I don't know if the ambassador thinks that. But I have to say, I feel that Gorbachev's idealism is a new realism. And I think, you know, he was idealistic, as were people around him. But there was a sense of what the alternative is: weapons, more weapons, more nukes. That's not realism in this world. I'd say one last thing, which Anatole is better equipped to speak to: the remilitarization of Europe is going to lead to austerity budgets for a generation—a choice to give to the military because of a wrong view of Russia as an aggressive, expansionist power.

And that feeds into the NATO discussion, too, which Anatole raised, because NATO expansion eastward has truly been so central to the disintegration of relations. Today, to talk about the danger of NATO expansion is to forget that you had Bill Bradley and all these senators, and Tom Friedman interviewing George Kennan. But, not to be silly about it, I think there's a key on almost every reporter's computer labeled "Putin's talking points." I mean, if you look at Alaska, it was... Anyway, I will say that I liked what Anatole said about moral modesty, because I think one of the factors is that the United States says, "We won, we won."

And the triumphalism, which we saw a backlash to in Putin's remarks in Munich, played a role. I think those remarks triggered a wave of animosity and growing animosity. The last thing I'll say is about Yeltsin. The establishment in this country was pretty much in love with Yeltsin because he kind of gave things away. And the United States establishment was probably most comfortable with the shock therapy policies, which savaged the middle class and led to Putin to some extent. And I think understanding Putin—well, how we can get from Reykjavik to ending the Ukraine war—is a big topic for a second panel.

#Anatol Lieven

Of course, some...

#Anatol Lieven

People now complain because if you talk about the disastrous results of NATO expansion, you're accused, as Katrina says, of repeating Putin's talking points. Nobody, except possibly those of us here and some others, recalls that Gorbachev later, while, of course, in many ways very critical of Putin, was bitterly critical of NATO expansion and regarded it as essentially a betrayal of everything that he had tried to do and that he thought had been agreed. Yes. So, you know, that's an argument for why NATO expansion—and, of course, it wasn't just NATO expansion, it was everything that went with it—was so disastrous.

Just, you know, go back and look at what Gorbachev said in the 2000s. Just to continue an earlier point and follow on from what Katrina said about the effects of shock therapy, Jeffrey Sachs has talked about how, when he was very much, of course, a free-market adviser in the early '90s, he went first to the Bush and then to the Clinton administrations and said, "Look, we need to provide

Russia with a stabilization fund of the kind that we have given to Poland and other countries, which, of course, played a critical part in stabilizing their economies and in laying the basis for successful economic reforms."

If it hadn't been for that, you know, if you had had the continued collapse of the Eastern European economies, you wouldn't have had what are now regarded as the economic miracles. And you wouldn't have had anything resembling early accession to the European Union because the economies would just not have been capable of it. But anyway, Jeff says that the first response was, "Oh, well, you know, Russia has lots of oil and gas and minerals. It doesn't need our money to stabilize its economy. They can do it for themselves." As Jeff said, given what was happening to the Russian economy and ordinary Russians at the time, that was a grotesque argument.

But he said you only had to dig a very little more, and people would say quite openly, "No, no, no. I mean, why should we help Russia to get strong again? You know, if it gets strong again, it will be a rival." Some of them said, you know, "It will threaten its neighbors." So it's to our advantage that Russia should remain weak. Well, I mean, that's pretty much, you know, what almost all Russians say. It's what the Russian hardliners have been saying since the 1990s. In those days, we regarded them as, you know, utterly beyond the pale and paranoid and so forth. Well, maybe they weren't so paranoid.

#Pascal

Yeah, we are nearing the end of the panel, but I would like to give the last word to Ambassador Jack Matlock. And Ambassador, do take the time you would like to talk about the lessons that we should take from the failures of the last 30 years and also from Reykjavik. And maybe, you know, how to get back to a spirit of détente, how to get back to Reykjavik, how to get back to the idealism that we can do something about this animosity.

#Jack Matlock

Well, it's going to be difficult to get back because, you know, as we were negotiating the end of the Cold War, first of all, it was necessary to try to solve problems. And the way we defined the diplomacy, we named four what we called agenda items. And each of them was couched as "cooperate to." Cooperate to reduce nuclear weapons and all weapons to the degree possible. Cooperate to reduce violence in third countries. Cooperate to improve human rights, not beat on them because they are violating human rights, as if we are not. And then finally, cooperate to build a better working relationship. That was the way we defined things at a time when people were talking about tearing down the Iron Curtain. We didn't mention the Iron Curtain.

We said, "Cooperate to improve relations." And that meant to open up, and it meant to really bring down the Iron Curtain and stop interfering. What strikes me is that since the end of the Cold War, we have been doing the opposite. First of all, we talked about a victory. And that was the last thing

we wanted to do. We wanted to say that these agreements were in the interest of both sides, and they were. So it should not be called a victory. And going back to Reagan, you know, he wrote about four pages in his own handwriting of what he expected from Gorbachev. And one of his points was, "We're too much up front on human rights. We must deal with that privately." And the final point was, "Whatever we achieve, we must not call it victory."

And then there were the victory people. Of course, George Bush, when he was in his election campaign and it looked as if he might lose, started saying, "We won the Cold War." Gorbachev very much resented that because, actually, Bush had been negotiating many things very, very well. For example, he didn't call on Gorbachev to tear down the wall. Instead, he complimented Gorbachev on his perestroika and so on. And so they let the Germans tear down the wall. It was clear to me that, in developing negotiations, you had to put things in terms of mutual benefit, which, of course, they were. And it also meant that before you make great public proposals that might be seen as putting the other side on the spot, you've got to have your quiet diplomacy.

So one of the things I did before that first summit meeting was draw up a list of areas where we thought we could have cooperative agreements. We sent it to them privately and said, "This is what we're thinking about. If you've got problems with some of these, we'll take them out. If you've got ideas for more, please add them." They added a few, and this really became the basis of one of our agreements. So in almost all of these things, we began to talk about them privately before we went public. Now, since the end of the Cold War, we started talking about, "Well, we're the great victors." And we certainly got that with the Clinton administration: "We're number one, and the 20th century is ours, and the 21st century is going to be even more so."

And then we also developed the idea that we were going to dominate the world, and we had to spread democracy, and we'd use our economic strength and our military strength. All of that was, I would say, completely contrary to what was necessary. So from the late '90s on, we had an administration with a military doctrine of total dominance—land, sea, air, space—and also one that was beginning to develop military agreements throughout the world. I think we now have bases in about 80 different countries. Now, obviously, this was bound to create problems with other countries. Even today, we are flying, as we have been for decades, you know, patrols along the borders of China. I mean, why? How would we feel if they did that to us?

I think what happened in the '90s was that suddenly our military-industrial-congressional complex realized that we no longer needed this huge defense budget and so on. They were desperate to find peer enemies. And so, I mean, Iran wasn't quite enough. You had to have Russia and China. So we developed military doctrines that obviously other large countries could not accept. And this policy of expanding NATO, of course, turned it into an offensive, not defensive, alliance. And that was proven by the first war against Serbia, when we bombed Serbia, you know. And Serbia had not attacked any NATO member. So we were the first to use NATO in an offensive way. And, of course, this became the first big issue with Russia.

So the thing is that NATO has been used as an offensive force, and unfortunately, we have given Putin a precedent for everything he's done internationally. We went to war against Serbia. We went to war—a total war—against Iraq, occupying it and so on. The war in Afghanistan started with UN approval. The one against Iraq, of course, was based basically on a lie: that they had chemical weapons or maybe nuclear weapons. They had eliminated them. So I say, when you look at that and then we say how horrible Putin is—yes, I think he has done horrible things—but internationally, and in war, he has done nothing worse than what we have done. I would say we have done even worse by giving Netanyahu the weapons to commit genocide in Gaza.

Why can't we recognize these things and get back to a more peaceful society? Yes, we still are the strongest country in the world, militarily and politically. And that means that if we're going to keep ourselves safe, we've got to use these things, I would say, with great restraint. And we're not. And as I look at the future, it's not just nuclear weapons. The development of artificial intelligence is going to empower not just smaller powers, but individuals to do things like develop plagues or all sorts of things. And we need the cooperation of countries to control these things. And the idea that, oh, we've got to race with China—I'll tell you, if AI brings on something that is a threat to humanity, who cares who gets it first? I mean, so much of our thinking today certainly worries me.

#Pascal

Thank you very much, Ambassador Matlock. These are very, very, very, very sane words. And we must remember: victory is not peace. What we should strive for is peace, not a cheap win. I would like to thank you all for participating in this. Again, Katrina vanden Heuvel from the American Committee for U.S.-Russia Accord, Ambassador Jack Matlock, who served in the Soviet Union, and Anatol Lieven from Responsible Statecraft. Everybody, thank you so much.

#Katrina vanden Heuvel

Thank you. Thank you, Pascal. Thank you for the opportunity. Ambassador, thank you.